

WOMEN OF COLOR LEADING CHANGE: BRIEFING PAPER

For over 150 years, YWCA has been at the forefront of advocating for the rights and protections of women who dare to dream, lead and change the world. From education, to civic participation, YWCA empowers and emboldens women across the lifespan, and across differences to lead. However, despite the gains women have made in all arenas of public and private life, the numbers are stark—the wage gap still exists, men still outnumber women in leadership positions and from Congress to corporate leadership, women of color are far underrepresented. The role of women, and particularly women of color in leading and shaping change is becoming more pressing, as demographic trends point towards women of color becoming the majority among all women in the United Statesⁱ by 2050. YWCA will continue to work towards the elimination of racism wherever it exists, and by any means necessary.

Women make up half of the United States populationⁱ.

- Women are 50.8 percent of the United States population, while men are 49.2 percentⁱⁱⁱ.
- Women of color are 36.3 percent of our nation's female population and approximately 19.5 percent of the entire U.S. population^{iv}.
- Women are 57 percent of the U.S. labor force^v, and 59 percent of the college-educated, entry-level workforce^{vi}.
- Women of color make up 38 percent of the female workforce^{vii} and 17.8 percent of the U.S. workforce.^{viii}
- Women earn almost 60 percent of undergraduate and graduate degrees—they also earn 47 percent of all law degrees, and 48 percent of all medical degrees^{ix}.
- Women of color excel in higher education, achieving higher rates of associates, bachelors, and graduate degrees than their male peers.^x

Despite making up half of the population and half of the workforce, women, and particularly women of color, are underrepresented in leadership across fields.

- The wage gap still exists. Asian women working full time make **90 cents** for every dollar paid to their white male counterparts. White women working full time make **76 cents** for every dollar paid to their white male counterparts. African American women working full time make **62 cents** for every dollar paid to their white male counterparts. Native Hawaiian women working full time earn **60 cents** for every dollar earned by their white male counterparts. Native American and Alaska Native women working full time make **58 cents** for every dollar paid to their white male counterparts. And Latina bear the burden of the largest gap, making **54 cents** for every dollar paid to their white male counterparts^{xi}.
- Though women make up half of the U.S. population, they make up less than 20 percent of seats in Congress. Women make up less than 20 percent of seats in the 115th Congress, with 83 women serving in the U.S. House of Representatives and 21 women serving in the U.S. Senate.^{xii} Among

these congressional seats, 34 women in the House and four women in the Senate are women of color.^{xiii} Across the country, only 6 percent of elected officials are women of color.^{xiv}

- Women currently hold only 29 CEO positions at S&P 500 companies. Of the women CEOs employed, only two are women of color. Only 14 percent of Executive Officers in Fortune 500 companies are women. On the Fortune 500 list, just 27 companies have female CEOs,^{xv} only one of whom is a woman of color.
- 3.1 percent of board seats for Fortune 500 corporations are filled by women of color, but that is only because a quarter of those board members sit on multiple boards. 4.4 percent of S&P 500 board positions held by women were filled by Latinas, while 3.7 percent were filled by Asian women and 11.7 by Black women.
- Non-profits aren't faring much better. While women make up the majority (over 75 percent) of all workers in the non-profit sector, women comprise just 45 percent of all CEO and Executive Director positions. When examining the largest organizations with budgets in excess of \$25 million, women represent only 21 percent of leaders^{xvi}.
- Furthermore, the gender pay disparity persists. Even in women-dominated fields like nursing and social work, men are paid more, and promoted more quickly than their female counterparts^{xvii}. Female nonprofit executive directors on average made about 66 cents for each dollar earned by their male counterparts.
- Women despite the overwhelming majority of women in non-profits, women only represent 43 percent of non-profit boards—and a third of boards for organizations with large operating budgets. Only 20 percent of nonprofit board members were people of color in 2014 and in half of all non-profit boards, there is not a single women of color.
- Women hold only 27 percent—and women of color only 4.5 percent^{xviii}—of presidencies across all institutions of higher education.^{xix} While 76 percent of teachers, 52 percent of principals, and 78 percent of central office administrators in the K-12 system are women, men dominate the chief executive role, occupying almost three quarters of K-12 superintendent positions.^{xx} Of the 26.9 percent of superintendents in 2015 who were women, almost 11 percent indicated that they are women of color.^{xxi}
- But women of color *are* leading, and *want* to lead. In particular, African American women are the fastest growing group of entrepreneurs in the U.S. and Latinas were not far behind, with the rate of entrepreneurship growing at rates of 133.3 percent and 191.4 percent respectively from 1997 to 2007^{xxii}.
- From 2007 through 2016, nearly eight out of every 10 (79 percent) of net new women-owned firms launched during the past nine years have been founded by a woman of color.
- Black women are much more likely than white women (22 percent vs. 8 percent) to aspire to a position of power, and yet are more likely than white women to feel stalled in their careers^{xxiii}.
- While the rate of women of color owned businesses has grown exponentially, women of color are less likely to get seed funding due to a lack of access to networks and generational wealth. From 2011 to 2013 only 2.7 percent of the companies receiving venture capital funding during this period, had a woman CEO^{xxiv}.

The United States trails other industrialized nations.

- The United States is ranked 101 (of 193) in the world for the rate of women in parliament or other electoral positions^{xxv}.
- The United States currently ranks 60th in women's political empowerment on the Gender Gap Index^{xxvi}.
- The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women – or CEDAW, as it's known – was adopted by the United Nations in 1979. Nearly all the 193 member states of the United Nations have ratified it. Only seven haven't: Iran, Palau, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tonga. And the United States^{xxvii}.
- In a study of 41 industrialized nations, the U.S. is the only country that does not mandate any paid leave for new parents^{xxviii}.

When women of color lead

- Studies show that increased diversity, is good practice, and good for the bottom line: Companies in the top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity are 35 percent more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians^{xxix}.
- Companies with a high representation of women board members significantly outperform those with no female directors^{xxx}.
- Women of color leaders bring with them a strong commitment to mentoring, volunteerism, community leadership and a spirit of “giving back” – skills that may be transferable in workplace leadership^{xxxi}, lead to increased productivity and successful employment development.
- Most research says there is no inherent difference between the way that men and women lead. Many of the traits we have come to associate with leadership styles of men and women stem from common gender expectations and norms within broader society. For example, women are viewed as more nurturing, while men are seen as better negotiators^{xxxii}.
- However, evidence suggests women may make better leaders than their male counterparts by naturally creating a trusting organizational climate where employees at all levels can flourish. In fact, according to the Harvard Business Review, women are consistently rated higher than men by their employees for relationship-building, honesty, and inclusiveness, as well as in traits like taking initiative, driving for ideas, and boldness^{xxxiii}.
- In the U.S. Senate, women are better dealmakers. They are more likely to collaborate, co-sponsor bills, look for shared solutions and work across party lines^{xxxiv}.
- Women with decision-making power accelerate positive development outcomes, and increased gross domestic product per capita across the world^{xxxv}.
- Because women of color are poised to be the majority of all women in the U.S. in the next generation, investing in women of color leadership is good for women, their families, and the nation.

Barriers to leadership: Despite gains women have made in the last fifty years, namely in educational attainment and representation in various leadership roles, there are still many barriers that make the road to leadership more difficult for women, particularly women of color.

- **A Pipeline problem:** There are far fewer women in higher-paying employment fields in math, science and technology. However, the road to those fields starts much earlier. From early childhood, women and girls, especially girls of color and girls from lower income families, are already being redirected away from math and science education, potentially impacting their desire to enter those fields. Those gendered messages come from family, social norms and cues, teachers and other community leaders. By third grade, girls have already determined that they are less capable at math than boys, even when their work does not reflect that disparity^{xxxvi}. It is important to note though, that even for employees in the same field, doing the same work with the same amount of experience and credentials, the wage gap persists.
- **Continued Implicit and Explicit Bias:** Women leaders cite stereotyping as a significant barrier to advancement; these stereotypes are especially problematic for racially and ethnically diverse women who may avoid speaking up, or negotiating salary for fear of being labelled “angry” or “audacious.”^{xxxvii} This bias may prevent women from entering certain fields because employers in current leadership are more likely to hire others like themselves, or may cause early attrition because of discrimination or harassment.
- **Access to Formal and Informal Networks:** A large part of career progression includes mentorship and access to those in power. Both formal and informal networks, like golfing clubs, fraternities, or other places where businessmen may make decisions, build rapport, brainstorm or develop alliances, are largely inaccessible to women, and particularly women of color. A lack of access to these networks may explain the lack of advancement into the upper ranks for women of color. Both sexism and racism may restrict opportunities for women of color leaders^{xxxviii}. White women may have advantage by sharing values, and being in community with white men, thereby understanding community norms and expectations, and men of color are still allowed access – albeit – limited, to the “Good Ol’ Boys Club.”
- **Caretaking and “Women’s work”:** For women who choose to start families or have children, this is often the most difficult balance—the balance of career and family responsibilities. While women are advancing in the work place, they are still doing the greater share of household chores, cooking, and caring for children and elderly family members^{xxxix}. When a child is sick, 39 percent of mothers say that they are solely responsible for staying home from work to care for them, compared with only 3 percent of fathers.^{xl} Moreover, 66 percent of caregivers are women, and women spend 50 percent more time on caregiving duties than men.^{xli} This may have profound impacts on one woman’s ability to advance in the workplace, and may lead to gaps in employment, making it harder to find a new job, and leading to lower income. Even brief gaps and loss of work experience may impact later wages^{xlii}. This is especially important to women of color, who are more likely to be breadwinning mothers, and are also less likely to have access to maternity and sick leave^{xliii}.

Changing the Tide on Women of Color Leadership

- **Access to Paid Family Leave:** Only 6 in 10 workers overall have access to paid sick leave, including 64 percent of African American women, 67 percent of Asian women, and 61 percent of white women. Hispanic and Native American women have the least access to paid sick leave, with only 49 percent of Latinas and 53 percent of all American Indian or Alaskan Native workers having this option available to them.^{xliv} Workers in the lowest 25 percent of wage earners most often lose all income while on family or medical leave, as they are two to four times less likely than earners in the top 25 percent of wage earners to have access to any paid leave.^{xlv} Women are over-represented in the lowest wage occupations, comprising more than 60 percent of low-wage workers.^{xlvi}
- **Investing in Mentorship and Sponsorship Across the Lifespan:** For women locked out of traditionally masculine professions, having someone who can guide them through the process, “put in a good word” or act as a connector, can make the difference in career prospects. Workplaces should invest in formal mentoring across age, race, gender and other differences.
- **Fair Pay Act:** The Fair Pay Act would require employers to provide equal pay for work of equal value, whether or not the jobs are the same.^{xlvii} This law could minimize the disparity between jobs typically seen as masculine and feminine.
- **Address Bias and Discrimination in the Workplace:** An assessment of unconscious bias, coupled with an understanding of systems of oppression, could help organizations and companies level the playing field for leadership opportunities. Trainings on bias and diversity can begin a dialogue to help employees get on the same page about language, workplace values, and social and historical context. Employers may also decide to conduct employee surveys to understand what specific issues of bias are occurring. Interviewing former and outgoing employees to learn what experiences with bias may have caused them to leave. Talk with current employees, particularly women of color, to ask them what biases they have witnessed or experienced. Conduct an organizational diversity audit to root out unconscious biases^{xlviii}. Additionally, tangible workplace standards and policies which reduce discrimination and biases in hiring, promotions and leadership development create a culture of trust and transparency.
- **Family-friendly workplace policies:** Work-life balance is imperative to health, and worker retention^{xlix}. Family friendly work policies help many women and family caregivers get time off to care for a loved one, bond with a new baby, or even attend a child’s school play. Some of these policies may need legislative advocacy, but many can be implemented at an organizational level. For example, flex time, remote or telework options, maternity/paternity leave, flexible emergency leave and child care may allow women the flexibility to juggle the demands of life without sacrificing their careers.

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- ^v 2015 annual averages, *Current Population Survey*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
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- ^{vii} 2015 annual averages, *Current Population Survey*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
- ^{viii} See "Labor force by sex, race and Hispanic ethnicity" at https://www.dol.gov/wb/stats/latest_annual_data.htm. According to the 2015 annual averages reported in this chart, women overall are 46.8 percent of the U.S. workforce, while Black women are 6.5 percent, Asian women are 2.7 percent, Hispanic women are 7 percent, and other non-White women are 1.6 percent.
- ^{ix} Ibid.
- ^x Black and Latina women have higher rates of attainment for Master's degrees than their male counterparts, while Black women have higher rates of professional degree attainment, and Latina women have higher rates of doctoral attainment than their male counterparts. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2015/demo/education-attainment/p20-578.html>
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